LECTURE NOTE 7: CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICE

CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICE

Introduction

The advancement in communication and networking technologies and the adaptation of Internet and Intranet Technologies in organizational networks has given the Library and Information Centers an opportunity to improve the information services to the patrons in more effective way. Current Awareness Service of a library aims to provide information about recent arrival of books, journals and other library documents to the library members. This is usually done at libraries by taking printout lists and displaying on notice board and circulating this list among various departments.

Current Awareness Services has been important means for keeping the users up to date in their areas of interest. A current awareness service may be as simple as copy of table of contents or a bulletin containing bibliographic records, of articles selected from the current issues of journals and other material, and usually organized by subjects Current awareness services (CAS) alert scholars, researchers, and health care practitioners to recently published literature in their fields of specialization.

Librarians who provide these services use various methods to keep current with academic and professional literature. Traditional methods include routing print journals, distributing photocopied journal tables of contents, and simply browsing professional publications. Newer methods include conducting saved searches in preferred databases and creating e-mail table of contents alerts.

Why do we need current awareness services

Published scientific and technical information has grown rapidly during this century particularly after the Second World War on account of large expenditures on research, and development by government and industry. As a consequence of the growth in the volume of scientific and technical information, scientists, engineers, technologists, and managers face several problems in accessing information, and in keeping themselves abreast of new developments.

i. The rate at which new information is being generated, even in narrow subject areas makes it difficult for a researcher to keep himself abreast of new developments in his area of specialisation.

Ii. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research i.e., the fact that research and development is no longer done by individuals but by team of researchers belonging to different disciplines has resulted in the scattering of information. It means that information relevant to a given discipline is also found in journals of other disciplines. For instance, information relevant to an electronic engineer may appear in journals dealing with solid state physics, optics, materials science and electrical engineering, apart from journals in electronics.

iii. Useful information can occur in a variety of document types. Until recently the journal or periodical was the main medium for the communication of new information. While this is true even today, other media in the past 40 years have also emerged and grown. Examples of these are conference papers, technical reports, patents, theses, and standards.

A current awareness service has the following characteristics:

i. The service is usually in the form of a publication, and attempts to bring information that is current or of recent origin to the attention of its users.

ii. The service does not seek to answer any specific questions that the user may have.

iii. The service is usually confined to a well-defined subject area or topic. However, topics from related areas are also covered in the service.

iv. The service may sometimes confine itself to a given type of literature, e.g., patents; or may cover different types of literature. The service could be bibliographical in nature, e.g., a list of references with or without abstracts. The service could also be discursive, e.g., a newsletter. In this type of current awareness service usually there are short contributions from professionals with the objective of highlighting recent developments or exchanging information and ideas.

v. The service endeavours to alert its users of the recent development as quickly as possible.

vi. The service attempts to make browsing convenient and easy for the user.

TYPES OF CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICE

i. **Contents-by Journal Service**- In this type of service, the library or documentation centre, or a commercial publisher distribute a publication which contains copies of contents pages of journals in a broad area, e.g.. life sciences. If a library provides the service, it normally restricts it to the journals received in the library. The rationale behind this type of service is that journals are the predominant medium for communicating new information. If users can be regularly informed of

journal articles appearing in current journals in broad or narrow areas, they would come to know of recent articles or papers in their areas of interest.

The simplest way in which this can be done is to duplicate the contents pages of journal issues and circulate them individually or in a compiled form to users. Another rationale for this type of service is the fact that users tend to value certain journals very high and look forward to browsing through the issues of these journals as soon as they are received in their library. The contents page service enables them to quickly know the titles of articles published in journals of their interest. Once they identify interesting or useful papers, they can then go to the library and read the papers. Alternatively, they could write to the authors of those papers and obtain a reprint or a copy of the paper. This way the user builds up his personal collection of useful information. The Contents-by-Journal service is perhaps the cheapest and quickest way of providing a degree of current awareness. This is because very little intellectual effort is expended in providing this service. However, this service also suffers from disadvantages.

Some of these are:

A lot of effort is called for on the part of the user to locate information that is useful to him.

Since this type of service provides only titles of papers, it is difficult to determine the usefulness of paper, in many cases, without actually examining the full papers.

ii. **Documentation Bulletins or Current Awareness Lists:** This is by far the most predominant form of current awareness service provided by libraries. In this kind of service, the library or documentation centre scans primary journals and other sources of current information received in the library to identify potentially useful articles of interest to their users The bibliographical details of such articles are collected, and classified or grouped into broad or narrow subject groups. At periodic intervals (fortnightly, monthly, etc.) the collected bibliographic entries are listed under the different subject headings, class numbers, or groups. The list is then duplicated and circulated to users.

A documentation bulletin may sometimes include abstracts of papers listed in the bulletin. The provision of abstracts greatly enhances the usefulness of the documentation bulletin since the abstract provides additional information about papers. If abstracts are well prepared, they can often be substituted for the original paper. Of course, more time will then be needed to produce this service

iii. Research-in-Progress Bulletins: This is another type of current awareness service and, as the name suggests, it alerts users of new research projects and the progress made in the research projects in hand. Such current awareness services usually require the joint effort of more than one organisation working in similar or closely related research areas. A parent body which funds or controls a group of research organisations could also bring out Research-in-Progress bulletins with the input to these bulletins being provided by the different laboratories or research centres under that body. A research-in-progress bulletin usually contains information about the laboratory at which the project is being done, names of principal and associate researchers, funds and sources of funds, duration of the project, and special equipment in use, if any.

In addition, it includes a narrative description of the research project and/or progress achieved till date. An example of this type of service is the United States Department of Agriculture's Current Research lnformation System (CRIS). All USDA laboratories and research stations contribute their input to CRIS. It is a computer-based service, and it can be searched to retrieve information on research projects.

iv. Newspaper Clipping Service Newspapers are current awareness media, since they publish news of recent happenings on the political, social, and economic front of a nation or region. Newspapers carry useful information to everyone from housewives to top management of companies and ministers. Again, newspapers are of different kinds. Some of them are local or regional in their orientation and coverage, others are national or international. Further, some newspapers specialise in economic or financial news and contain in depth analysis of industry, trade, banking, commerce, etc. Given the above characteristics of newspapers, it is not surprising that they are considered as valuable sources of information.

Libraries and documentation centres, therefore, provide information services based on newspapers. In the newspaper clipping service, a library subscribes to one or more daily or weekly newspapers, carefully chosen for their coverage of areas of interest to the organisation. Each of these newspapers is scanned and any items of interest to the user group are clipped (i.e., cut) and pasted on a sheet of thicker paper or card. The clipping is then assigned one or more subject headings or group/class codes. At periodic intervals, i.e. daily, weekly) the clippings are arranged by subject headings or group code and disseminated to users. In a small organisation, batches of clippings themselves in one or more groups may be circulated to users. In larger organisations, or where the

circulation is wide, a bulletin containing the news item with or without an annotation may be circulated. The clippings themselves are filed in vertical or suspension file folders for possible use at a later date. Newspaper clipping services are quite common in libraries of government departments, banks and financial organisations, and industrial development agencies.

V. RSS FEEDS

RSS (most commonly defined as Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary) is a web feed format used for publishing frequently updated digital content, such as blog entries, news headlines, audio, and video, in a standardized, machine-readable format. RSS feeds are essentially a standardized XML (Extensible Markup Language) file (often called an RSS feed or channel) that summarizes content from a website. RSS is a powerful, passive, and highly user-driven tool for delivering CAS.

How it Works (The Basic Process):

1. A website publishes new content (e.g., a news story).
2. The website's RSS feed is automatically updated with a new item containing the title, a brief summary, and a link back to the full article.
3. A user's Feed Reader (or RSS Aggregator) regularly checks the RSS feed for new items.
4. When new content is detected, the Feed Reader pulls it in and displays it to the user.

Other Features of RSS Feeds

i. Opt-in Service: The user actively chooses (subscribes) to the specific information sources (websites, journals, blogs) they want to monitor.

ii. Personalization: Users build a highly customized portfolio of sources relevant to their exact research, professional, or personal interests.

iii. Push Technology: The updates are "pushed" to the reader, meaning the information arrives almost instantly after it is published by the source.

iv. The **RSS Reader/Aggregator** acts as the central hub for the user's CAS. Examples include Feedly, Inoreader, or even built-in browser/email clients.

v. Consolidation: All new content from multiple, disparate sources is collected and displayed in one unified interface.

vi. Display of New Arrivals

This is the physical display of new books, journals, or book jackets in a prominent area of the library. It also serves as a visible, immediate alert to library users who visit the space. It can be provided using a rotating carousel or gallery of new electronic book/journal covers on the library's website or portal.

vi. Curated Newsletters: Information professionals manually or semi-automatically curate industry news, regulatory updates, or key research from multiple sources. The compiled summary is packaged into a professional newsletter and distributed via email (e.g., a "Weekly R&D Digest").

vii. Search/Query Alerts (Saved Searches): The user constructs a complex search query using keywords and Boolean operators in an online database (e.g., PubMed, Web of Science, LexisNexis). The search is saved and the system is set to re-run it automatically (daily, weekly, monthly). Any new documents added to the database that match the saved query are immediately emailed to the user as a search result list.

viii. Publisher/Database Alerts (TOC Alerts): Publisher services refer to the CAS tools provided directly by academic and commercial publishers (e.g., Elsevier, Wiley, Springer) or database vendors (e.g., EBSCO, Clarivate's Web of Science) that own and manage the source content. Users register for a free account with a specific journal publisher or database (e.g., Elsevier, EBSCO). They select specific journal titles to monitor. The system monitors the database and notifies the user every time that original article is cited in a newly published article or subscribed journal is published online, the user automatically receives an email containing the Table of Contents (TOC) with direct hyperlinks to the articles. This essential for researchers to track the influence of their own work or to follow the development of a core theory or seminal paper.

ix. Discussion Lists (Listservs and Email Groups): Discussion lists (often managed via List Servers or simple email group software) provide a community-driven, subject-specific CAS channel. The information dissemination relies on the contributions of the group members rather than a formal publishing cycle. Examples are

A. Subject-Specific Listservs: Users subscribe to a mailing list focused on a very specific professional or academic topic (e.g., "Digital Humanities Research List," "Toxicology Policy Group"). Members often post announcements about new publications, funding opportunities, relevant conferences, calls for papers, or new regulatory changes that are highly relevant to that niche group. They also facilitate direct Q&A and networking.

B. Social Media/Professional Groups (Modern Equivalent): Groups on platforms like LinkedIn, private Facebook groups, or dedicated academic networking sites (like Academia.edu or ResearchGate). Similar to Listservs, these groups announce new publications, discuss research methods, and share news, often with higher interactivity and multimedia content than traditional email lists.